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PHILLY FORAY

Celebrate America's birthday with the Founding Fathers

By BECCA HENSLEY

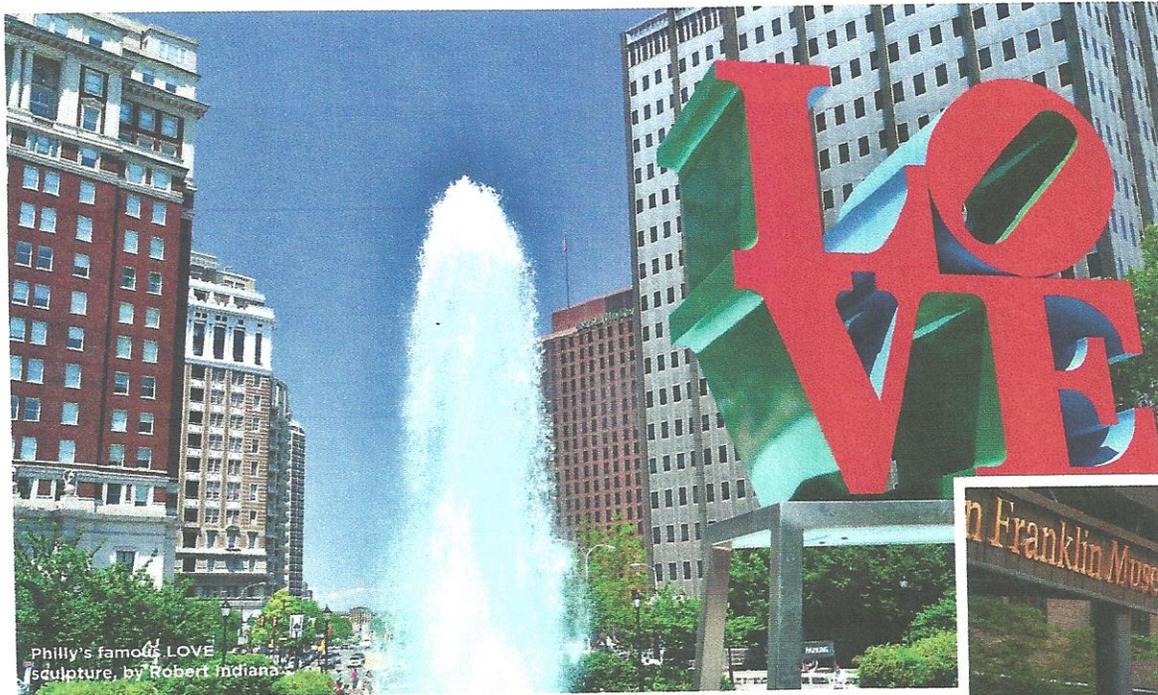
If man-of-action Benjamin Franklin lived in modern times, I'd like to think he would have run up the stairs of the Philadelphia Museum of Art—waistcoat and all—just like Rocky Balboa. I can see him raising his arms in a V for victory, before heading to the Italian Market's Pat's King of Steaks or Geno's Steaks for an onion-and-Cheez-Whiz-heaped crusty roll, filled with thinly-sliced rib-eye beef, sweet or hot peppers and ketchup.

It's also easy to imagine him reveling in the contemporary evolution of urbane Philadelphia, praising its ability to strive forward through hard times and repeatedly reinvent itself.

Franklin would celebrate the new amusements as much as the Liberty Bell and Independence

Hall. He'd enjoy Hippo Haven at Adventure Aquarium in nearby New Jersey, where hippos can be seen underwater, and he'd cool off with the throngs at Spruce Street Harbor Park, a pop-up waterfront playground in the middle of the city. As an oenophile, he'd cherish the BYOB restaurant scene, and he'd marvel at the Reading Terminal Market, an indoor assemblage of cheese mongers, farmer stalls, bakeries, and butchers, including the Amish vendors who sell their goods Tuesdays through Saturdays.

The only issue a time-transported Franklin would have is seeing it all. So here's some advice: exploring Philadelphia means unraveling its layers. First-time visitors should base at a centrally located hotel, such as Hotel Monaco,



Philly's famous LOVE sculpture, by Robert Indiana

WHEN YOU GO

STAY Sleep soundly at ideally located Hotel Monaco. monaco-philadelphia.com

EAT Snack like a local by picking up a soft pretzel from a street vendor or gelato at Capogiro. capogirogelato.com

DO See the city's murals, soak in history at Independence Hall and go to the zoo. muralarts.org/tour; nps.gov/inde; philadelphiazoo.org

set next to Independence National Historical Park and the vibrant must-see historic district. A chic boutique hotel which has a rooftop lounge overlooking Liberty Bell Center and LEED Gold Certification, Hotel Monaco exemplifies how old and new coexist in modern-day Philly.

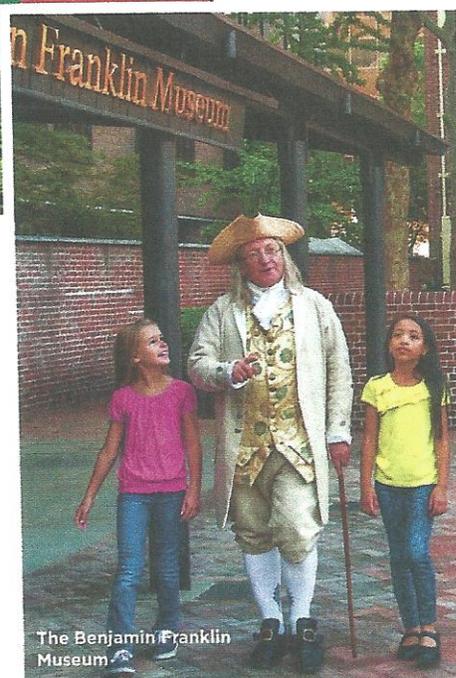
A logical place to start, Independence Hall defines the birthplace of the nation. As we all learned in grade school, the Founding Fathers gathered here in 1776 to sign the Declaration of Independence. Eleven years later, a dozen states sent representatives to eke out the model for the U.S. Constitution. Daily guided tours take visitors back to the past. (Plan to arrive 15 minutes early to allow for security inspection). Across from Independence Hall, the forever-cracked Liberty Bell sits in the Liberty Bell Center, open for inspection year round. Independence Park, the UNESCO listed parcel, which holds these sites, also contains other historic buildings, such as Franklin Court, a museum dedicated to Benjamin Franklin, the First Bank of the United States and the United States Postal Service Museum.

After the history, the biggest draw to Philadelphia might be Rocky Balboa. Follow Visit Philadelphia's do-it-yourself boxer tour with a jog down the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, past the city's soaring skyline, and up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Afterward, pose for photos with the bronze Rocky statue at the foot of the steps, before continuing to the Italian Market District, where Rocky was cheered on by a coterie of vendors. Stop to buy Mortadella imported from Bologna

and Parmigiano Reggiano from Parma for a picnic in the park. Or, like Rocky, nosh on a Philly cheesesteak before asking the guys at Esposito's Meats if you can practice your left hook on a side of beef in the back of the butchery.

This summer a slew of museum exhibitions give you ample reason to get out of the city's heat. Be among the first to tread through the eagerly awaited Nicholas and Athena Karabots Pavilion, a 53,000-square-foot addition to The Franklin Institute, one of America's premier interactive science museums. The centerpiece of the new wing will be *Your Brain*, an exhibit dedicated to psychology and neuroscience. Patrons can climb through giant neurons and test their brains with teasers. The expansion also includes a rain garden and an immense exhibit space, which hosts *Circus! Science Under the Big Top*, through Sept. 1. At the Philadelphia Zoo, an overhead, see-through-mesh trail system called Big Cat Crossing opened in May. You can glimpse tigers, lions, jaguars and other large cats as they crisscross 14 feet above you. The cat trail mimics the zoo's Treetop Trail for smaller primates and the Great Ape Trail, which is a highway for orangutans.

Geeteel Philadelphia manifests itself in signature sites such as Boathouse Row, a National Historic Landmark comprised of picturesque 19th century boathouses on the Schuylkill River, and the Barnes Foundation, a collection of impressionist, early modern paintings and African sculpture. Edgier art can be found on the exterior walls of buildings around town. Mural Arts, a program begun in 1984 to eliminate graffiti,



The Benjamin Franklin Museum

promotes professional and emerging artists and interested youngsters by showcasing their talents in a controlled, constructive way. More than 3,600 murals have been created. See them via a variety of walking, biking and trolley tours.

If you're in to pyrotechnics, what better place to celebrate the nation's birthday than in one of its original cities, which takes its dazzling, firework scattered skies seriously throughout the season. On Independence Day, the Philly 4th of July Jam and Grand Fireworks Finale lights up the heavens along Benjamin Franklin Parkway, where the Philadelphia Art Museum serves as backdrop. All summer, the Camden Riversharks minor league baseball team treats fans to firecracker magic during certain home games. And Longwood Gardens puts on a series of twilight spectacles, ideal for watching atop a spread blanket with a picnic basket.

However long you stay, the City of Brotherly Love will welcome you. ★